

*Dr Wilson Jewell -*  
*238 West 6th*  
ON

THE EFFECTS *with the respects*  
OF *the author -*

# SECLUDED AND GLOOMY IMPRISONMENT

ON INDIVIDUALS OF THE

AFRICAN VARIETY OF MANKIND,

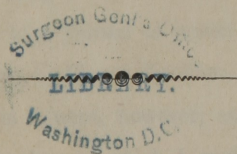
IN THE

PRODUCTION OF DISEASE.

BY

BENJAMIN H. COATES, M.D.

Read at the Centennial Anniversary of the American Philosophical Society,  
May 29th, 1843.



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*To William Lloyd*  
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*The Editors*  
*of the*  
*Anti-Slavery*

RECEIVED AND COPIED IMPRISONMENT

OF THE

AFRICAN VARIETY OF MALARIA

IN

A PRODUCTION OF DISEASE

BY

BENJAMIN H. COATES, M.D.

Author of the "Lectures on the History of the American Colonies," &c.  
New York: 1841.

PHILADELPHIA

JOHN C. GARRISON, 15 N. 2ND STREET

1841

## ON THE EFFECTS

OF

## SECLUDED AND GLOOMY IMPRISONMENT,

&amp;c. &amp;c.

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HAVING been for many years an official visiter of the Eastern Penitentiary of this State, my attention became strongly drawn to the great inequality in the operation of separate and gloomy confinement on individuals of the white and the coloured races of mankind. At the request of a member of this Society, I drew up a statement on the subject, embracing tables; and that statement has been forwarded for insertion in a journal of prison discipline, published at Frankfort on the Maine, by Messrs. Noellner, Julius and Warrentropp. The tables included in it, were, however, composed from incomplete materials, though the best to which I could then procure access; and wanted the means of concluding a judgment of the year 1841. They were sufficient for the purpose then in view; particularly for the moral arguments intended to be used; and were employed accordingly.



Since then, through the politeness of Mr. George Thompson, the Warden of the Penitentiary, and of Mr. Holloway, the Clerk of the institution, I have been favoured with the necessary means to complete the averages of the year 1841; which thus enables me to present, for the first time, a complete abstract of the relative mortality of the two colours in that prison, from its commencement to the last annual report of its condition.

A disproportionate mortality has deep and afflicting interests for a humane mind. These have been urged in their proper place, both in the paper above mentioned, and in a partial communication to the Philadelphia Prison Society, not intended for publication. The facts appear to me, however, to be also valuable in a scientific sense; and I beg leave to offer a succinct account of them in their now completed form, as a discussion in public hygiene.

The mortality of the coloured convicts in this penitentiary has been so great as to swell the total amount, and attract the attention of humane critics; and this has, at times, been so far the case as to impair the character of the prison, and tend to diminish the public confidence in the mode of punishment adopted in it. With the controversies which have grown out of this, we have nothing to do; but the result exhibited was that the average mortality of white convicts in the prison was less than that of the white inhabitants of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia; while that of the coloured prisoners greatly exceeded the mortality of either white or coloured among our general population.

The following table of the mortality of the first eight years of the use of the prison is given by Dr. Darrach, in the Ninth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Penitentiary, page 12. I have arranged the columns in a different order, and have also calculated



backwards the whole number of the deaths, which are not given in that form by Dr. Darrach, and inserted them. The fractions are those of Dr. Darrach.

Years.	Total Average No. in Prison.	Average Number of Whites.	Average Number of Coloured.	Total Deaths.	White Deaths.	Coloured Deaths.	Total Mort. p. ct.	White Mort. p. ct.	Col'd Mort. p. ct.
1830	31	21.81	9.19	1	1	0	3.	4.19	0.
1831	67	47.75	19.25	4	2	2	6.	4.18	10.02
1832	91	69.42	21.58	4	1	3	4.4	1.44	13.52
1833	123	89.30	33.70	1	1	0	.8	1.11	0.
1834	183	123.58	59.42	5	1	4	2.7	.8	6.68
1835	266	154.74	108.26	7	2	5	2.6	1.26	4.61
1836	360	202.	148.	12	2	10	3.3	.99	6.74
1837	387	233.	154.	17	7	10	4.3	3.	6.49

The first prisoner was received Oct. 22d, 1829. During the period of two months, nine days, which elapsed between this date and the first of January, 1830, but few prisoners were in the house, the number was not uniform, and is not reported; and no deaths took place: it is, therefore, excluded from our averages.

I have compiled from different annual reports, most of the results which follow; and have arranged them with their references in a tabular form for convenience of inspection. For two of the items I am indebted to the politeness of Mr. Holloway, the Clerk of the Prison.

Years.	Receptions.		Total recep- tions from beginning.		Average Population.		Deaths.		Mortality per et.	
	White.	Col'd.	White.	Col'd.	White.	Col'd.	White.	Col'd.	White.	Col'd.
1836 8th Report, p. 10	84	59 p. 10								
1837 9th Report, p. 3	101	60 p. 3*								
1838 10th Report, p. 25	115	63 p. 25	659 p. 4	377 p. 4	240 p. 5	161 p. 5	7 p. 19	19 p. 20†	2.92	11.8
1839 11th Report, p. 3	99	80 p. 3	758 p. 4	457 p. 4	245 p. 16	173 p. 16	2 p. 33	8 p. 33	.81	4.62
1840 12th Report, p. 3	88	51 p. 3	846 p. 4	508 p. 4	232 p. 20	162 p. 20	9 p. 24	13 p. 24	3.88	8.02
1841 13th Report, p. 3	83	43 p. 3‡	929 p. 3	551 p. 3	203 Mr. H.	144 Mr. H.	4 p. 18	13 p. 18	1.97	9.03
1842 14th Report, p. 3	102	40 p. 3	1031 p. 4	591 p. 4	212 p. 4	130 §	3 p. 4	6 p. 4	1.41	4.61

Those who examine the above tables cannot fail to notice the frequent existence of strong and glaring instances of disproportion between the two colours. Such are the occurrence of very high ratios, a manifold mortality out of the smaller number, &c. Thus, in 1832, three coloured deaths occurred and only one white; though the whites outnumbered the coloured in the proportion of 69 to 22; rejecting fractions and taking the nearest unit. In 1834, the coloured deaths were 4, the whites 1; coloured population, 59, white, 124.

\* An error in the text, easily corrected.

† A trifling error in page 20.

‡ Dr. Darrach, page 15, classes 2 more as whites.

§ An error at page 4, where it is made 120.

Next year the deaths were 5 and 2, though the larger mortality occurred among 108, and the smaller among 155. In 1836, the numbers were 10 and 2, among a population, respectively, of 148 and 202. In 1839, they were 8 and 2, among 173 and 245, respectively. This had not ceased to exist in 1842, when they were 6 and 3, among 130 and 212.

The irregular fluctuation of the mortality is also remarkable in both races, but particularly among the coloured. Among these it varied from nothing in 1830, to 2 in 1831; and from 3 in 1832, to nothing in 1833, and again to 4 in 1834. From 1841 to 1842, it is diminished more than one-half. Nor do these changes bear any relation to the changes of the population. The most remarkable fluctuations among the whites are from 1836 to 1837, when the deaths varied from 2 to 7, with scarce any change in the amount of population; from 7 in 1838, to 2 in 1839, and again to 9 in 1840; while the fluctuations of the population were in both cases in the opposite direction. During the last two years there has been a reduction.

I do not know all the epidemic causes which have contributed to produce this remarkable result. Certain I am that there was no distinction between the treatment of the two races. It is apparent from the reports of the physicians, and well known among the superintendents of the prison, that almost all the augmentations of deaths among the coloured prisoners occurred by scrofula, including pulmonary consumption.

To obtain an average of mortality for the whole duration of the prison, excepting the two months, nine days, of organization, I have added together the average populations of the whole thirteen years, and compared the amount with the total number of deaths for the same period. From this I obtain the following results:--



Total white averages, 13 years, with the fractions given,	2073.60
Total white deaths, 13 years,	42.
Average rate per cent. of white deaths in 13 years,	2.03
Total coloured averages, 13 years,	1323.40
Total coloured deaths, 13 years,	93.
Average rate per cent. of coloured deaths, 13 years,	7.03

The reasons why my inquiries were in the first instance directed to the Eastern Penitentiary, have been already alluded to. It is that one of our prisons most open to the inspection of the public, and which has attracted most of the public attention. Its population is, besides, of a more permanent character. I have not been able to consult the records of the Moyamensing Prison. Mr. Crans, the clerk to that institution, to whose politeness I am under obligations, has left me, after a free conversation, under impressions confirmatory of what has been observed in the Penitentiary; making always sufficient allowance for the very large differences in the class of subjects received there, and the duration of their confinement. I feel, also, strongly called upon to express my thanks for the politeness and love of truth of Mr. George Thompson, the Warden of the Penitentiary, who gave me every facility, and, among other things, completed my set of reports: and for those of Mr. Holloway, who obligingly compared my conclusions with the records of the institution, and furnished me with some materials in which I was deficient.

To obtain a more complete view of this subject, it could be wished to compare the above results with those obtainable in relation to the comparative mortality of the white and coloured races in our city and suburbs. Our climate, together with the mode of life prevailing among these so frequently unfortunate people, destroys a large pro-

portion of them beyond the average of our own race. I have not, as yet, been able to obtain the correct population of the districts within the bills of mortality from the census of 1840, so as to render available the statements of mortality obligingly furnished me at the Health Office, and enable me to draw averages of the city and liberties during the thirteen years to which these inquiries extend. In the absence of these, I have no better temporary alternative than to employ the records of the ten preceding years.

From the researches of Dr. Emerson (Medical Statistics, Nov. 1831, p. 28), it appears that the relative proportions of deaths of white and coloured persons in the city and suburbs of Philadelphia, from 1821 to 1830, inclusive, were as given in the following table, in which I have added, for convenience, the decimal numbers in the two last columns.

	Whites.	Coloured,	Whites, per cent.	Coloured, per cent.
1821,	1 in 49.1	1 in 16.9	2.31	5.92
1822,	„ 41.9	„ 21.5	2.39	4.65
1823,	„ 33.8	„ 17.5	2.96	5.71
1824,	„ 35.1	„ 17.5	2.85	5.71
1825,	„ 42.4	„ 27.0	2.36	3.70
1826,	„ 40.3	„ 26.1	2.48	3.83
1827,	„ 47.4	„ 18.9	2.11	5.29
1828,	„ 43.6	„ 20.8	2.29	4.81
1829,	„ 44.0	„ 23.7	2.27	4.22
1830,	„ 45.4	„ 27.2	2.20	3.68

To draw an average of the whole which should be absolutely correct, it would be necessary to have the whole numbers. These are not given by Dr. Emerson. The averages of the above ratios are,

for the whole ten years, whites, 2.422; blacks, 4.752; and these are probably near the truth.

Now these numbers are to each other in the proportion of 1 to 1.96. That is, out of an equal number of each complexion residing in our city and suburbs, to every hundred deaths of white persons there die one hundred and ninety-six coloured persons. The deaths above given as occurring in the prison (whites 2.03, coloured 7.03), are to each other as 1 to 3.46: or, out of an equal number of both complexions residing in the Penitentiary, to every hundred deaths of white persons there would die three hundred and forty-six coloured persons!

It is necessary here to bear in mind, that the convicts in the Penitentiary are not, as has been sometimes supposed, the most wretched and most exposed to hardships of our population. The most miserable, and in particular, the most miserable blacks, seldom commit the higher crimes which render them liable to the longer periods of confinement for which the Penitentiary is intended, but are generally either convicted for lighter offences, or committed for vagrancy. In both cases they are sent to Moyamensing. Besides, the immediate effects of drunkenness, recent colds and violence, have generally had time to subside before the prisoners are sent to the Penitentiary; as, prior to this, they must undergo their trials, and remain committed in the other prison, if not bailed.

It is evident that a comparison on terms of perfect equality cannot be made between the white mortality in the prison and that in the city. Of causes tending to diminish the proportion of deaths in the prison, one of the most important is, that the convicts are generally persons in the prime of life, and that the prison is exempted from the heavy mortality of infancy, and from that of old age. On the other



hand, there must be admitted to occur among the convicts a large proportion of individuals who have injured their constitutions by a vicious mode of life. With this proviso, there is a convenience in placing together these four ratios in a common view, as follows:—

	Per cent.
White mortality in Penitentiary, 13 years,	2.03
White mortality in city and suburbs, 10 years,	2.422
Coloured mortality in city and suburbs, 10 years,	4.752
Coloured mortality in Penitentiary, 13 years,	7.03

If Dr. Emerson's average of white deaths in the city and suburbs be assumed as unity, these numbers will then be represented as follows:—

Whites in Penitentiary,	-	-	-	.838
Whites in city and suburbs,	-	-	-	1.
Coloured in city and suburbs,	-	-	-	1.962
Coloured in Penitentiary,	-	-	-	2.903

I cannot doubt that the above statements will be found fully sufficient to establish the fact, that there exists an immense discrepancy in the effect of imprisonment between the coloured people and the whites; and that there is an essential difference in this, as in so many other respects, between the two races. The most prolonged and narrow inquiry has failed to discover any difference in the treatment of these two classes in the prison, unless it be, that, from the dislike of cold, the coloured convicts frequently deprive themselves of a portion of their ventilation.

It is evident that the difference is founded in nature and reality, and is not the mere opinion of an unimportant individual. If the reality of the occurrence be thus granted, it is proper to bring in that

evidence, explanatory and confirmatory, which is founded in physiology and in medical experience. The negro, or even the mulatto, is a very different person, in his physical and psychical conformation, from that one who may be presumed to have been held in view in our legislation, the white Anglo-Saxon, Celt, or German. His ancestry, and the prototype of his race, are calculated for the torrid zone; and even the mixed progeny suffer severely and mortally by our cold. Cheerful, merry, lounging and careless, the Ethiopian American deeply enjoys the sun and light; delights in the open air; and is, as a general rule, constitutionally free from that deep, thoughtful anxiety for the future, so conspicuous in his paler neighbour. The face of heaven seems to him necessary to his existence; and though long confinement is, in his case, less productive of gloomy remorse, it is far more depressing to his vitality.

The morbid effects of this is unhappily visible in the production of scrofula, and pulmonary consumption; more than eighty-eight per cent. of the deaths being from chronic affections of the lungs, and from the first named disorder. The moral consequences are, in an equivalent degree, depressing to the mind. It is not by remorse and anguish that he is affected, so much as by intellectual and moral weakness and decay; and gloomy confinement becomes thus to him, mentally as well as physically, a nearer approach to the punishment of death. The effect of separate imprisonment has not been, as has been erroneously charged against it, to produce insanity, although a humane and strict analysis has shown many to have been affected both with insanity and with imbecility, at the times when they committed the offences for which they were sentenced. The effect upon the unfortunate coloured prisoners, though scarcely perceptible upon the whites, has been to produce not

mania, but weakness of mind; dementia, instead of deranged excitement.

Throughout this inquiry, I have generally preferred reasoning from the deaths, partly from the force of the consideration, but principally, as regards the scientific question, for the sake of the greater mathematical precision of the results. We have, in the reports for 1837, 1838, 1839, and 1842, a detail of the mortal diseases and immediate causes of these, in forty-three cases of coloured persons. These are as follows:—

Consumption and chronic inflammation of the lungs; 1837,	
6 cases; 1838, 12; 1839, 1; 1842, 1, - - -	20
Scrofula of the chest, 1838, 1, - - -	1
Chronic pleurisy, 1838, 2 cases; also affected with chronic inflammation of the stomach, or with that of the bladder, and with paralysis: 1839, 5; of which 1 was cut off by brain fever: 1842, 1, - - -	8
Scrofula, of other parts than the chest, 1837, 2 cases; 1838, 4, including affections of peritoneum, bowels and knee joint; 1839, 2, including peritoneum and hip joint; and 1842, 2,	10
Typhus fever, 1837, - - -	1
Remittent fever, 1837, - - -	1
Asthenia, 1842, - - -	1
Tetanus, from a burn, 1842, - - -	1
	—
Total,	43
	—

Vicious habits are enumerated as causes in fourteen of the cases; and in three of them, they are the only cause assigned. Four are ascribed to previous syphilis; and in one, no other cause is recorded.



Of nineteen deaths of white prisoners, during the same years, the diseases were as follows:—

Consumption, 1837, 5 cases; 1838, 3 cases,	-	-	8
Pulmonary and hip disease, 1842,	-	-	1
Brain fever, reported as owing to scrofula and disorganized lungs, 1837,	-	-	1
Syphilitic chronic pleurisy, 1839,	-	-	1
Scrofula,	-	-	0
Syphilis, 1837,	-	-	1
Chronic bowel complaints, 1838, 1; 1842, 1,	-	-	2
Small pox, 1838,	-	-	2
Asthenic brain fever, 1839,	-	-	1
Stone, 1838,	-	-	1
Diseased arteries and enlarged heart, 1842,	-	-	1
			—
	Total,		19
			—

Vicious habits are assigned as a cause in four cases; and in two are the only cause named. Vice before admission is represented as a cause in four cases; and in two of them is the only one named.

Of forty-three deaths of coloured convicts, twenty-nine are ascribed to chronic diseases of the lungs, and to affections of an adjacent structure, in which these are extremely liable to produce such diseased changes; and ten to scrofula of other parts than the lungs; leaving only four for all other affections; and these four were produced by typhus fever, remittent fever, asthenia and tetanus. Of nineteen deaths among white persons, on the other hand, the causes are found in chronic diseases of the lungs and their appendages, for

eleven cases; scrofula, *none*; chronic bowel complaint, two; small pox, two; and four others are severally attributed to syphilis, asthenic brain fever, stone, and diseased arteries, with enlarged heart. Reduced to per centages, these proportions would read as follows:—

*Coloured.*

Diseases of chest, exclusive of heart and arteries,	-	65.12
Scrofula,	- - - - -	23.25
All other diseases,	- - - - -	11.63
Total,		<hr/> 100. <hr/>

*White.*

Diseases of chest,	- - - - -	57.89
Scrofula,	- - - - -	0.
All other diseases, including bowel complaints, 10.53, and small pox, 10.53,	- - - - -	42.11
Total,		<hr/> 100. <hr/>

